

A REVIEW
OF
CANADIAN
POLITICS
SINCE 1917

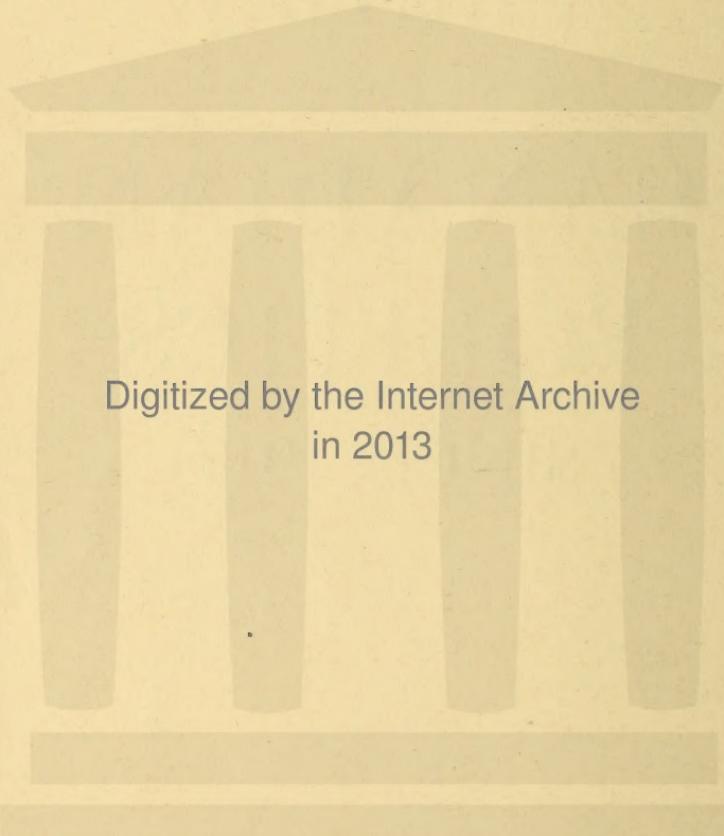


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A Review of Canadian Politics Since 1917

The year 1917 was perhaps the most momentous in the annals of Canadian politics because during it there arose the question of conscription which effected a political revolution. The question was a soul and conscience stirring one, unparalleled in Canadian political discussion. Party hero-warship, political shibboleths, party friendships were thrown to the winds and men voted as the idea appealed to their conscience and their honour. The Union Government then formed was given an unmistakeable mandate to carry on so that Canada would continue to take its full share in defeating the German, in maintaining civilization, and in preserving the honour and the liberties not only of the Empire but of Canada itself. Never was there a more overwhelming pronouncement by the Canadian people at the polls. The old Liberal leader, Sir Wilfrid Laurier,—the hero of a hundred fights,—was completely snowed under. To their great sorrow hundreds and thousands of Liberals who had followed him faithfully and loyally had to break their swords of allegiance to him at the call of their conscience. It was a political tragedy indeed.

Well then, the Union Government, comprising able, if not the ablest men in both political parties, took up the torch handed them by the people and carried on. No body of men ever had greater or more serious responsibilities and obligations cast upon them. They had to

work like galley-slaves. In the old piping days of peace if Cabinets had to deal with three or four important national question in the course of a year they considered themselves hard worked. But these men were overwhelmed day and night with thousands upon thousands of pressing questions which called for immediate decision. There were no Labour Union hours for them. They were compelled to burn the candle at both ends; and, moreover, they were too busy to advertise what they were doing. They had no time and less inclination to play politics. They were content to play the national game and it only, so far as their best judgment went.

Many of their tasks were decidedly unpleasant. When a country is in a war in which its very existence is at stake the gentle arts of peace and of politics necessarily have to be forgotten. Swift, resolute decisions had to be taken, regardless of politics or the feelings of individuals, to accomplish definite necessary purposes. Increased taxes; embargoes; restrictions; law-enforcement against shirkers and slackers; rigid discipline; commandeering of industries; control of food and war munitions—all more or less irksome but all absolutely necessary—had to be resorted to, in our efforts to win the war. It is not to be wondered at that some people complained. Fair complaint is justifiable at all times; but looking back on events we ask the question seriously whether the Union Government, of which the present Government is the successor, had a fair show or deal from the Canadian people. Prominent newspapers that supported them during the election abandoned them without a shadow of excuse. Prominent politicians who joined them stayed only for a short time and then fell

back into their old party ruts. Criticism was as incessant as it was unreasonable. Little attempt was made by these critics to ascertain the facts. They simply slammed, panned and banged away knowing little about the facts and apparently caring less. The members of the Government, as has been stated, were too busy with their national work to reply to their critics, except in Parliament, and here let it be said, without fear of successful contradiction, that whenever the Opposition, Liberal, Farmer or Labour attempted to cross swords in the House of Commons they were ignominiously routed by a simple disclosure of the actual facts. Indeed the parliamentary record of the Opposition since 1917 is one of appalling ignorance, irresolution and futility.

Let it be repeated, that no body of men ever had so much work to do and none accomplished it better. More genuine reforms were brought about in the last three years than for twenty-five years previously. They point with pride to their record in carrying on Canada's war activities, to their treatment of the returned soldiers, to their Soldiers' Re-Establishment and Land Settlement schemes, to soldiers' pensions, the highest in the world, to the gratuities to soldiers, the largest in the world, to the life insurance scheme for soldiers, to their Technical education, Good roads and Housing policies; to the fact that they abolished political patronage; to their efforts to assist the Provinces in bringing about prohibition, if they so desired, to their establishment of a Department of Health, long needed and now performing wonderful service to the public; to the extension of the franchise to women; to the Franchise Act, described, even by newspapers opposing the Government, as the

fairest Franchise Act ever passed. They are able to prove that largely by reason of their administration Canada came out of the war financially better than any of the belligerent countries except the United States, which, of course, was only in it for a short time. They are able to cite the fact that our national securities stand today as high as any in the world and that our national debt is smaller per capita than that of any country in the world, except the United States. The high standard of the credit of the country has undoubtedly been maintained and industries of all kinds, farming and otherwise, have prospered. The wise action of the Government in granting credits to Great Britain and other countries after the war helped greatly to tide over the very difficult period between the close of hostilities and the resumption of peaceful pursuits.

The old Government and the present Government can show that their taxation measures have been skilful and scientific and have placed the burden largely on those best able to bear it. The Business Profits tax which took on the average between 35 per cent. and 40 per cent. of profits over 7 per cent. realized in four years no less a sum than \$124,000,000. The Income Tax, which is as high as that of the United States and is very substantial indeed, brought in \$34,000,000 up to the 1st of August last. Whenever they could cut down taxes in the interests of consumers and producers they did so at the earliest possible moment. To illustrate,—they abolished the import war tax of 5 per cent. against England and 7 1-2 per cent. against the United States, and they very substantially reduced the duties on agricultural implements. The Sales Tax of 1 per cent. which they im-

posed this year is a scientific innovation which has been wonderfully successful and has led the way to the world.

In all these measures of reform and constructive acts the Government got little if any support from the Opposition. On the contrary they were hampered and met with puerile, destructive criticism at every turn. Never, even by mistake, was any suggestion of a constructive nature offered by the Opposition. Examine the records of Parliament for yourself and you will see that this is true.

Now what is the situation? We are in the aftermath of the war and in some respects it is as bad as war itself. The world is filled with unrest; Bolshevik doctrines pollute the air in Europe, including Great Britain, and this North American continent is by no means untainted with them. Financial and trading conditions never were more disturbed. The world's credit system is in danger. The currencies of all countries are inflated, some of them absurdly so,—for instance, in Russia where iron nails pass as currency. Business men all over the world are on tenterhooks and fearful of grave losses in the swing-back of civilization to common sense and decent prices. The newspapers are filled with horror and trouble. In Ireland bloody murder is rampant. The Poles and the Russians are at each others throats. Great Britain is in the throes of a miner's strike which is paralyzing industry and causing untold loss and suffering. Millions of people in European Countries lately at war are at the lowest depths of poverty and despair. The air of the world seems to be charged with a dis-

temper which sets man against man and class against class. It all seems so unreal and hideous and utterly foreign to the teachings of the Master upon which we have imagined civilization is founded.

Here in Canada we are not so badly off. Indeed our lot is a happy one compared with most of the peoples of the earth, but we are by no means unaffected. The virus of discontent and unrest has a strong hold, as witnessed by the revolutionary methods at Winnipeg last year; the attempts of the Radicals and the One Big Union followers to control the sensible Labour Union organization; the fiery outbursts of the Radicals and Reds appearing in the press from time to time and the tons of Bolshevik literature being systematically smuggled into the country and distributed. We cannot afford to bury our heads in the sand like the ostrich and say, "all is well." All is not well. There never was a time in Canadian history when sensible men and women were called upon to take a more serious and sober view of conditions. It is a time for the utmost caution and for the greatest sanity of thought and action. It is the worst of all times to play party politics which are in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred based upon pure selfishness. The necessity is as great today as it was during the war for all right thinking people to stand and work together in order that the nation as a whole may steady down to normal and be prepared for any shock which the terrible conditions of the world may bring about.

There stands the Meighen Government! With full and accurate knowledge of conditions, they say to the people: "Stand firm; don't be stampeded; hold fast to

the old honourable traditions of your country and your race; don't rock the national boat; pull together to stem the tide of unrest and discontent; believe in the rule of law; insist upon orderly, not revolutionary, progress; don't experiment in fiscal policies until the financial and trading skies of the world are clear; don't make the Canadian dollar worth a good deal less than it is today in the United States by favouring policies which would insure the importation of more goods from that country.

The highest aim of statesmanship should be to provide the maximum amount of profitable labour in every sphere of human activity, and never was it more important to keep that aim in view.

Further, Premier Meighen says:—"For forty years Canada has had a customs tariff, at times high, but for the last twenty-five years under Liberal, Conservative and Union government what might fairly be described as moderate. During the latter period particularly the country has made wonderful progress and has developed into one of the most promising of all the younger nations of the earth. In view of that and of all the conditions of the world which we have described, is this a good time to think of making radical changes in our trading system? No, it is not the time. If Free Trade or low tariff were the best possible policies theoretically to adopt, this is the worst of all possible times to adopt them. It would be like taking a leap in the dark. With the world in a veritably crazy condition and with our dollar at a heavy discount in the United States, due to our buying more goods from them than we sell to

them, we would be still more crazy if we let go a sure investment for an exceedingly doubtful speculation. **We know we have prospered and made wonderful progress under a moderate tariff. We do not know how we would fare under free trade or low tariff.** We have only the word of Mr. Crerar and Mr. Wood, who are by no means infallible that we would be better off if we adopted their views. As for Mackenzie King, he knows little about the tariff, the best evidence of which is that he talks copiously about it. He theorizes; he evades, squirms and twists, but never gets within a thousand miles of taking a definite attitude which ordinary people can understand. In a word, he is trying to be all things to all men and is striving to conceal his lack of a definite policy with oceans of meaningless words. His great predecessor, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, was a moderate protectionist in office and carried out that policy for fifteen years. Ninety-nine per cent. of the eastern Liberals who followed him were and are moderate protectionists. The Meighen tariff policy today does not vary one jot or tittle from the principles which governed the Liberal tariff in operation for fifteen years, and that policy could be conscientiously subscribed to by every eastern Liberal, to say nothing of the moderate Liberals in the west, if party politics were only forgotten.

